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### **Liking and consumption of vegetables with more appealing and less appealing sensory properties: Associations with attitudes, food**

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**LIKING AND CONSUMPTION OF VEGETABLES WITH MORE APPEALING AND LESS APPEALING SENSORY  
PROPERTIES: ASSOCIATIONS WITH ATTITUDES, FOOD NEOPHOBIA AND FOOD CHOICE MOTIVATIONS IN  
EUROPEAN ADOLESCENTS**

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**Declaration of Interests:** None

28 **HIGHLIGHTS**

29 The unappealing sensory properties of vegetables may contribute to low intakes

30 Vegetables with more and less appealing sensory properties were compared

31 Higher vegetable intakes were associated with higher liking & healthier eating habits

32 Liking differed for vegetables with more and less appealing sensory properties

33 Strategies to increase intakes may benefit from focussing liking & healthy eating

34

35    **ABSTRACT**

36    Vegetable consumption in adolescents is reported to be low, at least in part, due to the unappealing  
37    sensory properties of vegetables, such as bitter tastes, but not all vegetables have unappealing sensory  
38    properties, and strategies to improve consumption may benefit from wider consideration. This work aimed  
39    to understand the individual characteristics in adolescents from four European countries associated with  
40    the regular consumption and liking of vegetables with more appealing and less appealing sensory  
41    properties. Adolescents from Denmark (N=178), the UK (N=155), France (N=206) and Italy (N=197)  
42    completed self-report questionnaires to assess all variables. We found higher self-reported consumption  
43    and liking of vegetables with more appealing than less appealing sensory properties. Regular consumption  
44    of both types of vegetable was associated with healthier eating habits and a higher liking for each vegetable  
45    type. Liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties was higher in individuals with lower  
46    food neophobia, healthier eating habits, higher interest in consuming foods for sensory reasons and higher  
47    liking for vegetables with less appealing properties. Liking for vegetables with less appealing sensory  
48    properties was higher in individuals with lower food neophobia, higher concern for the consumption of  
49    natural foods, and higher liking for vegetables with more appealing properties. Some gender and country-  
50    specific differences were also found. Our findings suggest that strategies to increase vegetable  
51    consumption in adolescents should focus on increasing healthy eating in general, increasing vegetable  
52    liking, and may benefit from reducing food neophobia and enhancing the positive sensory and natural  
53    aspects of vegetables.

54

55    **Keywords:** vegetables, taste, individual characteristics, demographic characteristics

56

57

## 58 1. INTRODUCTION

59 A high vegetable consumption is associated with many health benefits (Appleton, Hemingway, Saulais, et  
60 al., 2016; Aune, Giovannucci, Boffetta, et al., 2017; Oyedobe, Gordon-Dseagu, Walker & Mindell, 2014;  
61 Wang, Ouyang, Liu, et al., 2014; Woodside, Young & McKinley, 2013), yet vegetable consumption across  
62 Europe and the world remain lower than recommended for health reasons (EFSA, Vereecken, Pedersen,  
63 Ojala, et al., 2015).

64

65 Vegetable consumption is reported to be particularly low in adolescence (EFSA, 2008; Vereecken et al.,  
66 2015). EFSA report mean intakes across 25 European countries that range from 26g/day in Sweden to  
67 227g/day in Poland, and Vereecken et al., 2015 report daily vegetable intakes in between only 20%  
68 (Estonia) and 54% adolescents (Belgium) in 33 European countries. Dietary intakes in adolescence are  
69 important. Adolescence is a period of rapid development, from physical, cognitive and social perspectives,  
70 when food choice also becomes under more individual control (Mikkila, Rasanen, Raitakari, Pietinen &  
71 Viikari, 2005; Nu, MacLeod & Barthelemy, 1996; Story, Neumark-Sztainer & French, 2002), and when the  
72 development of eating habits can become established and sustained (Larson, Neumark-Sztainer, Harnack,  
73 Wall, Story & Eisenberg, 2008; Li & Wang 2008; Mikkila et al, 2005; Von Post-Skagegard, Samuelson,  
74 Karlstrom, Mohsen, Berglund & Bratteby, 2002).

75

76 Many reasons have previously been given for low vegetable consumption in adolescence. Environmental  
77 and societal factors continue to impact considerably on adolescents, as is found for children (Gebremariam,  
78 Henjum, Terragni & Torheim, 2016; Giskes, Turrell, Patterson & Newman, 2002; Larson et al., 2008;  
79 Middlestadt et al., 2013; Trude, Kharmats, Hurley, Anderson Steeves, Talegawkar & Gittelsohn, 2016). Low  
80 vegetable consumption in adolescents has been associated with low parental education and socio-  
81 economic status (Gebremariam et al, 2016; Giskes et al, 2002; Middlestadt et al, 2013), low vegetable  
82 consumption by the parents (Gebremariam et al, 2016; Middlestadt et al, 2013), low availability in the  
83 home and a family environment that is unsupportive of vegetable consumption (Gebremariam et al, 2016;  
84 Larson et al, 2008; Middlestadt et al, 2013; Trude et al, 2016).

85

86 Taste, texture, and liking can also be important in adolescents, as is found for children (Cox, Melo, Zabaras,

87 Delahunty, 2012; Dinehart, Hayes, Bartoshuk, Lanier & Duffy, 2006; Dinnella et al., 2016; Krolner,

88 Rasmussen, Burg, Klepp, Wind & Due, 2011; Larson et al., 2008; Middlestadt et al., 2013). Vegetables are

89 often reported to be poorly liked and so poorly consumed due to unappealing tastes, such as bitter and

90 sour (Cox et al., 2012; Dinehart et al., 2006; Dinnella et al., 2016; Krolner et al., 2011), and unappealing

91 textures, such as slimy, granular and hard / hard-skinned (Dinnella et al., 2016; Krolner et al., 2011;

92 Zeinstra, Koelen, Kok & de Graaf, 2010). Not all vegetables however have unappealing tastes and textures.

93 Many vegetables are considered more sweet-tasting than bitter-tasting by both trained and consumer

94 panels (Cox et al., 2012; Martin, Visalli, Lange, Schlich & Issanchou, 2014; [van Stokkom, Teo, Mars, de](#)

95 [Graaf, van Kooten & Stieger, 2016](#)), and some vegetables have pleasant textures and bright colourful visual

96 appeal (Dinnella et al., 2016; Poelman, Delahunty & de Graaf, 2017). Vegetables with more appealing

97 properties offer micronutrients and so health benefits, although the health benefits of different vegetables

98 are known to differ (Appleton et al., 2016). There is some suggestion that less appealing dark leafy green

99 vegetables have greater health benefits in general, but ideally a range of vegetables and so a combination

100 of vegetables with more appealing and less appealing sensory properties should be consumed for health

101 benefits (Appleton et al., 2016; Aune et al., 2017; Oyedobe et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014; Woodside et al.,

102 2013).

103

104 Individual cognitions, such as attitudes, beliefs and understanding, also gain increasing importance in the

105 eating habits of adolescents. Vegetable consumption in adolescents has been associated with an awareness

106 of food knowledge and the importance of vegetables for health (Middlestadt et al., 2013; Trude et al.,

107 2016), increased self-efficacy for healthy eating (Gebremariam et al., 2016; Trude et al., 2016) and a

108 willingness and ability to ask for vegetables from parents (Middlestadt et al., 2013). [The data by Vereecken](#)

109 [et al., 2015, however show lower vegetable intakes in 15 year olds compared to 13 years olds, and lower](#)

110 [intakes in 13 year olds compared to 11 year olds \(Vereecken et al., 2015\).](#)

111

Other studies demonstrate the importance of sensory characteristics in the consumption of vegetables, and demonstrate distinctions between vegetables based on taste properties (Cox et al., 2012; Dinehart et al., 2006; Dinnella et al., 2016). Dinnella et al., 2016, for example, find carrots, tomatoes and green salad to be characterized by sweet, umami and delicate flavours, while cauliflower and broccoli were characterised by bitter tastes and objectionable flavours. Van Stokkom et al., 2016, find the majority of vegetables in their study to be characterised by a sweet taste, while tomato products were characterized more by umami and sour tastes, and onion and leek juices were more characterized by bitter tastes. Few studies have focussed on adolescents. Focussing on vegetables of differing sensory properties and individual adolescent cognitions may offer opportunities for targeting and increasing adolescent vegetable consumption. Strategies to increase vegetable consumption in adolescents are sorely needed (Appleton et al., 2016), but these strategies should be based on the determinants or barriers to vegetable consumption on a population-wide basis. Interventions that either address challenges or maximise facilitators will have increased chances of success compared to those without a similar theoretical underpinning (Craig, Dieppe, Macintyre, Michie, Nzareth & Petticrew, 2008; Michie, van Stralen & West, 2011). Furthermore, interventions that focus on challenges or facilitators that impact on a large proportion of the population will be of increased impact on a population-wide scale (Craig et al., 2008). This work aimed to investigate the individual characteristics associated with the regular consumption and liking of vegetables with both more appealing and less appealing sensory properties in adolescents from four European countries.

130

## 131 2. METHOD

Data were collected as part of the VeggiEAT project, an EU-funded project aiming to understand and increase vegetable intakes in adolescents and older adults from four European countries – from North to South: Denmark, the United Kingdom, France and Italy. These countries represent different European cultures, cuisines and consumption patterns, particularly with respect to vegetables (EFSA, 2008; Pelt, 1993). In Italy, for example, raw and salad vegetables are frequently consumed, while the traditional diet in the UK contains more cooked and more root vegetables (EFSA, 2008). The proportion of adolescents eating

138 vegetables daily are also reported to be low in these countries. Figures range from 45% in France, 42% in  
139 Denmark, 38% in England to only 25% in Italy (Vereecken et al., 2015).

140

141 Data to assess the regular consumption of a number of vegetables, liking for vegetables and various  
142 individual characteristics that may impact on vegetable consumption were assessed using self-report  
143 questionnaires.

144

## 145 **2.1. Questionnaire**

146 The questionnaire assessed various demographic characteristics, self-reported regular consumption of  
147 various vegetables, liking for various vegetables, and individual attitudes to food consumption, in that  
148 order.

149

150 **2.1.1. Demographic characteristics:** The demographic characteristics assessed were gender, age, country of  
151 residence, and social affluence. Social affluence was assessed using the four questions and scoring system  
152 of the Family Affluence Scale (FAS II) developed by Boyce and Dallago (2004): 'Does your family own a car,  
153 van or truck?', answers 'no' (score 0), 'yes, one car or van' (score 1), 'yes, more than one car or van' (score  
154 2); 'Do you have your own bedroom for yourself?', answers 'no' (score 0), 'yes' (score 1); 'How many  
155 computers does your family own? (Do not include playstations or other computers that can only be used  
156 for games)', answers 'none' (score 0), 'one' (score 1), 'two' (score 2), 'more than two' (score 3); 'During the  
157 past 12 months, how many times did you travel away on holiday with your family?' answers 'not at all'  
158 (score 0), 'once' (score 1), 'twice' (score 2), 'more than twice' (score 3). Answers to all questions were  
159 summed to result in a score from 0 (low affluence) to 9 (high affluence).

160

161 **2.1.2. Regular vegetable consumption:** Regular vegetable consumption was assessed by asking for  
162 consumption of 11 vegetables that are used in all four European countries (EFSA, 2008): 'broccoli', 'carrots',  
163 'cauliflower', 'green beans', 'green salad', 'peas', 'spinach', 'sweetcorn', 'tomatoes', 'courgettes', and  
164 'beans, other than green beans'. These 11 vegetables were chosen due to differences in a number of



165 sensory properties (Poelman et al., 2017; Zeinstra et al., 2010), different uses in the different cuisines of the  
166 four European countries (EFSA, 2008; Pelt, 1993), and with consideration for other aspects of the larger  
167 VeggiEAT project. Vegetables were classified into two groups according to their sensory properties, based  
168 on the ratings of consumer and trained panels (Baxter, Schroder & Bower, 2000; Engel, Martin & Issanchou,  
169 2006; Poelman et al., 2017; Zeinstra, Koelen, Kok & de Graaf, 2007). Of the 11 vegetables, 'carrots', 'peas',  
170 'sweetcorn', and 'tomatoes' were classified as vegetables with more appealing sensory properties, due to  
171 the presence of a sweet taste, delicate flavour and bright appealing colour, while 'broccoli', 'cauliflower',  
172 'green salad', and 'spinach' were classified as vegetables with less appealing sensory properties. These  
173 vegetables are typically characterized by generally disliked sensory properties such as bitter taste,  
174 astringent sensation, objectionable flavour and dark unattractive colour. Three vegetables - 'courgettes',  
175 'green beans' and 'beans, other than green beans' typically receive similar ratings for sweet and bitter taste  
176 and neutral ratings for visual appeal, so were not assigned to either group. The question on consumption  
177 was included as part of a measure asking individuals to report their combined knowledge and frequency of  
178 consumption for all 11 vegetables developed by Backstrom, Pirttila-Backman & Tuorila (2004). This  
179 questionnaire describes combined knowledge and frequency of consumption increasing from lexical / visual  
180 knowledge, to a taste experience not associated with consumption, to frequency of consumption using the  
181 categories: 'I do not recognize the product'; 'I recognize the product, but I have not tasted it'; 'I have  
182 tasted, but I do not use the product'; 'I occasionally eat the product'; and 'I regularly eat the product'  
183 (Backstrom et al., 2004). Responses to the option 'I regularly eat this' were summed to provide number of  
184 vegetables with more appealing sensory properties (of 4) and number of vegetables with less appealing  
185 sensory properties (of 4) that were regularly consumed.

186

187 **2.1.3. Liking:** Liking was assessed for each of the 11 vegetables above, on an individual basis using a nine-  
188 point scale ranging from 'I don't like it at all' (score 1) to 'I neither like it nor don't like it' (score 5) to 'I like it  
189 a lot' (score 9). Scores were then summed across all 4 vegetables with more appealing sensory properties  
190 and all 4 vegetables with less appealing sensory properties for analysis, to provide a score per vegetable  
191 type from 4 (very low liking) – 36 (very high liking).

192

193 **2.1.4. Attitudes:** Individual attitudes towards food consumption were assessed using four published  
194 questionnaires. The Adolescent Food Habits Checklist (AFHC) (Johnson, Wardle & Griffith, 2002) provides a  
195 measure of healthy eating in adolescents based on self-reported food choices using 23 items requesting  
196 agreement or disagreement with a number of dietary practices. Response options include true (score 1 for  
197 a healthy behavior, 0 for a less healthy behavior), false (score 1 for a healthy behavior, 0 for a less healthy  
198 behavior), or not applicable (score 0), and are summed to result in a single score from 0 (less healthy  
199 dietary habits) to 23 (more healthy dietary habits). The Restraint Scale of the Dutch Eating Behaviour  
200 Questionnaire (DEBQ-R) (van Strien, Frijters, Bergers & Defares, 1986) allows an assessment of restricted  
201 eating for weight control using 10 items asking for frequency of several weight control behaviours.  
202 Response options range from never (score 1) to very often (score 5), and are averaged across all questions  
203 to result in a single score from 1 (low restraint) to 5 (high restraint). The Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) (Pliner  
204 & Hobden, 1992) assesses reluctance to try new or unfamiliar foods using 10 items requesting agreement  
205 or disagreement with a number of statements on new or unfamiliar foods. Response options range from  
206 strongly disagree (score 1) to strongly agree (score 7) on a 7 point scale, and are summed across all  
207 questions to result in a single score from 10 (low neophobia) to 70 (high neophobia). The Food Choice  
208 Questionnaire (FCQ) (Steptoe, Pollard & Wardle, 1995) measures a range of motivations underlying eating  
209 behavior and food choice. Three scales were used – those based on eating for mood-based reasons (6  
210 items), eating for sensory-based reasons (4 items), and concern for eating natural foods / products (3  
211 items). Items requested agreement or disagreement with a number of motivations for eating, using  
212 response options ranging from strongly disagree (score 1) to strongly agree (score 7) on a 7 point scale, and  
213 are averaged across all questions to result in a single score from 1 (low motivation) to 7 (high motivation).  
214 These three scales were chosen to reflect the motivations for food choice over which adolescents aged 12-  
215 16 years have control, that were not assessed with the other questionnaires. All questionnaires were  
216 demonstrated as reliable and validated at the time of development. Cronbach's alpha's for the responses in  
217 this study ranged from xx to xx. All questions were translated from English into relevant languages and back  
218 translated to ensure accurate translations. All questionnaires are frequently used to assess eating related

attitudes and various studies demonstrate their applicability across countries and cultures (Brunault et al., 2015; Fotopoulos, Krystallis, Vassallo & Pagisalis, 2009; Januszewska, Pieniak & Verbeke, 2011; Monteleone et al., 2017; Pieniak, Verbeke, Vanhonacker, Guerrero & Hersleth, 2009; Ritchey, Frank, Hursti & Tuorila, 2003).

## 2.2. Questionnaire Administration

Questionnaires were administered in paper form either following a separate task assessing the sensory characteristics of several different pea and sweetcorn samples (see Dinnella et al., 2016), or via teachers and researchers as an independent study. Where tasks were undertaken, these were undertaken separately from completing the questionnaire, and are very unlikely to have had any impact on questionnaire responses. Using both types of recruitment, for inclusion in the study, individuals were required to be aged 12 – 16 years, and able to fully understand and complete the consent procedures and questionnaires. This age range was selected to typify adolescents as individuals with some choice over their food intake, but where the choice remains limited for various reasons, such as the home environment, parental expectations, and limited incomes. Individuals over the age of 16 years, who are no longer living at home may demonstrate food choices more similar to those of adults resulting in a less distinctive sample and less informative investigation. No other inclusion / exclusion criteria were used to enhance the generalisability of the study findings. All participants provided written informed consent from themselves and from a parent / guardian prior to taking part. Researchers were available to answer questions if requested. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committees of the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, Bournemouth University, UK, Institut Paul Bocuse, France, and the University of Florence, Italy, prior to commencement.

Questionnaires were administered until a sample size of at least 150 participants was gained per country, as required for the analyses we wished to conduct (Cohen, 1998). A minimum of 150 participants would allow the detection of an effect size of 0.15 in a regression analysis using 14 predictors, at a power of 0.80, for a significance level of 0.05.

246

### 247 2.3. Analysis

248 Questionnaires with 10% missing data or more were discarded. Where less than 10% data per respondent  
249 were missing, missing data were imputed using mid-scale point values where scales were used (e.g. for  
250 attitudes) or means for the country sample where no scale was used, e.g. age. Less than 3% of all data  
251 points were imputed, thus data imputation is likely to have had a minimal impact on our results while  
252 allowing use of more of the available data.

253

254 Study samples were then described and investigated using ANOVA. General characteristics of vegetable  
255 consumption and liking were investigated using correlations and ANOVA. Regular consumption of  
256 vegetables with more appealing sensory properties and vegetables with less appealing sensory properties  
257 and liking for both types of vegetables were then predicted using regression models. Consumption  
258 outcomes were predicted using all demographic characteristics (gender, age, affluence (FAS II score), and  
259 country of residence), all individual attitudes (AFHC score, DEBQ-R score, FNS score, and FCQ – Mood, FCQ  
260 – Sensory and FCQ – Naturalness scores), and liking for both types of vegetables. Country was considered  
261 on an individual basis with respect to France. As a result, France can not be included in the regression  
262 models. We chose to consider all countries with respect to France because the sample size from France was  
263 the largest. Effects per country should be considered ‘with respect to France’ not as independent effects.

264 Liking outcomes were predicted using the same demographic characteristics and individual attitudes.

265 Correlations were first run to ensure against multi-co-linearity, and no high correlations between predictor  
266 variables were found (largest  $r=0.46$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). All analyses were conducted in SPSS, version 23 (IBM,  
267 Armonk, NY, USA).

268

### 269 3. RESULTS

270 Descriptive statistics for all individual characteristics and attitudes, and for vegetable consumption and  
271 liking for each country sample are provided in Table 1. Significant differences between countries were  
272 found in all individual characteristics and attitudes (smallest  $F(3,735)=6.96$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

273

274 Taking all countries together, adolescents reported regularly consuming significantly more vegetables with  
275 more appealing sensory properties than vegetables with less appealing sensory properties  
276 ( $F(1,732)=388.12$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and consumption of both types of vegetables was higher in France > Denmark >  
277 UK and Italy ( $F(3,732)=9.55$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Adolescents also reported liking vegetables with more appealing  
278 sensory properties more than vegetables with less appealing sensory properties ( $F(1,732)=374.15$ ,  $p<0.01$ ),  
279 and liking for both types of vegetables was higher in Denmark > France > UK > Italy ( $F(3,732)=38.19$ ,  
280  $p<0.01$ ). Liking for both types of vegetables were also correlated with each other ( $r=0.46$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

281

282 Table 1 about here

283

284 Individual characteristics and attitudes associated with the regular consumption of both types of vegetables  
285 are given in Table 2. **Taking other variables into account**, regular consumption of vegetables with more  
286 appealing sensory properties was lower in Denmark, and higher in individuals with healthier eating habits  
287 and with a higher liking for vegetables with less appealing sensory properties. A regular consumption of  
288 vegetables with less appealing sensory properties was also lower in Denmark, and was higher in individuals  
289 with healthier eating habits, and with a higher liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties.

290

291 Table 2 about here

292

293 Individual characteristics and attitudes associated with liking both types of vegetables are given in Table 3.  
294 **Taking other variables into account**, liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties was  
295 higher in males, and in Denmark and Italy, and was higher in individuals with a lower food neophobia,  
296 healthier eating habits, a higher interest in consuming foods for sensory reasons and in individuals with a  
297 higher liking for vegetables with less appealing sensory properties. Liking for vegetables with less appealing  
298 sensory properties was higher in females and in Denmark, and was higher in individuals with a lower food

299 neophobia, a higher concern for the consumption of natural foods, and a higher liking for vegetables with  
300 more appealing sensory properties.

301

302 Table 3 about here

303

#### 304 **4. DISCUSSION**

305 Adolescents reported regularly consuming more vegetables with more appealing sensory properties, than  
306 with less appealing sensory properties. This finding has been demonstrated previously (Cox et al., 2012;  
307 Dinehart et al., 2006; Dinnella et al., 2016; Krolner et al., 2011). However, for both types of vegetables,  
308 regular consumption was lower in Denmark, and was higher in individuals with healthier eating habits, and  
309 in individuals with a higher liking for each type of vegetable respectively.

310

311 While consumption was higher for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties, the comparability  
312 between vegetable types in the associations is interesting, and suggests associations with vegetable  
313 consumption in general as opposed to with the consumption of specific vegetables. Associations between a  
314 higher vegetable consumption, healthier eating habits in general and a higher liking for other vegetables  
315 have been demonstrated across the lifespan (e.g. Glasson, Chapman & James, 2011; Mikkila et al., 2005),  
316 and our study confirms these associations in adolescents from across Europe (Gebremarian et al., 2016;  
317 Johnson et al., 2002; Krolner et al., 2011; Larson et al., 2008; Middlestadt et al., 2013), and suggests that  
318 regular vegetable consumption is part of a healthy diet, even in adolescents. Liking is also a well-known  
319 predictor of food consumption across the lifespan (Appleton, 2006; Appleton, McGill, Neville & Woodside,  
320 2010; Appleton et al., 2017; Brug, Tak, te Velde, Bere & de Bourdeudhuij, 2008; Glasson et al., 2011;  
321 Mingioni et al., 2016), and some work has previously suggested a likely increased importance of liking for  
322 food consumption in young individuals, such as adolescents (Appleton et al., 2016, Cox et al., 2012;  
323 Dinehart et al., 2006; Krolner et al., 2011).

324

325 Importantly also, these factors - liking and healthy eating habits are potentially malleable. Several studies  
326 demonstrate the value of a number of strategies for increasing vegetable liking (Appleton et al, 2016).  
327 Repeated exposure, the use of rewards and the provision of positive education or experiences have all  
328 been found to increase liking for vegetables (Appleton, Hemingway, Rajska & Hartwell, 2018; Appleton et  
329 al, 2016; Nicklaus, 2016; Wadhera, Capaldi-Philips & Wilkie, 2015). Furthermore, while many studies have  
330 so far been conducted in children, success using these techniques for increasing liking and preferences for  
331 foods in other age-groups has also been demonstrated (Appleton, 2013; Appleton, Gentry & Shepherd,  
332 2006; Mobini, Chambers & Yeomans, 2007), including in adolescents (Ratcliffe, Merrigan, Rogers &  
333 Goldberg, 2011). The clustering of healthy eating habits to include the consumption of vegetables among a  
334 diet of other more healthy food items, also testifies to the benefit of strategies to increase healthy eating in  
335 general. Studies again demonstrate the value of interventions that focus not just on increasing vegetable  
336 preferences and consumption, but also on increasing preferences and the consumption of other healthy  
337 foods, and a general interest in a healthy diet (e.g. deCosta et al., 2017; Maderuelo-Fernandez et al., 2015;  
338 Savoie-Roskos, Wengreen & Durward, 2017; Zhou et al., 2018).

339

340 Adolescents also reported higher liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties than for  
341 those with less appealing sensory properties, as has again been demonstrated previously (Cox et al., 2012;  
342 Dinehart et al., 2006; Dinnella et al., 2016; Krolner et al., 2011). Comparability was again found between  
343 the vegetable types. Liking for both types of vegetables was associated with a lower food neophobia, and a  
344 higher liking for the other vegetables. Lower food neophobia has been repeatedly reported in association  
345 with increased vegetable liking and consumption (Guzek, Glabska, Lange & Jewewska-Zychomicz, 2017;  
346 Laureati et al., 2018; Mielby, Norgaard, Edelenbos & Thybo, 2012; Mustonen, Oerlemans & Tuorila, 2012;  
347 Russell & Worsley, 2008). Lower food neophobia has also been linked to increased variety within the diet  
348 (Falciglia, Couch, Gribble, Pabst & Frank, 2000), and increased preferences for and an increased  
349 consumption of different foods and different tastes (Flight, Leppard & Cox, 2003; Mielby et al., 2012).  
350 These findings suggest that strategies to increase vegetable liking may benefit from decreasing food  
351 neophobia. Lower food neophobia has been found to be associated with a higher exposure to different

cuisines and cultural diversity (Flight et al., 2003; Mustonen et al., 2012), and there is some evidence that educational interventions can reduce food neophobia to some degree (e.g. Park & Cho, 2016). The associations between vegetable types also suggest that adolescents who like vegetables with both more and less appealing sensory properties typically like a range of vegetable tastes, and again may suggest a liking for vegetables in general and a clustering of healthy eating preferences.

Differences in liking for vegetables based on their sensory characteristics were also found. Liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties was associated again with healthier eating habits, and with higher food choice motivations based on sensory reasons, and liking for vegetables with less appealing sensory properties was associated with higher interests in the consumption of natural foods. The association with healthier eating habits suggests again an interest in healthy eating in general, but it is interesting that this was found only for the vegetables with more appealing sensory properties. This may suggest a greater tolerance for the inclusion of vegetables with more appealing sensory properties into a healthy diet, and may suggest greater chances of increasing healthy diets by focussing on foods with more appealing sensory properties. Furthermore, the sensory component of the Food Choice Questionnaire involves smell, taste and appearance (Steptoe et al, 1995), and characteristics other than taste may be contributing to the higher liking for the more appealing vegetables in this study. Preferences have been found for foods with bright appealing colours (Dinnella, Torri, Caporale & Monteleone, 2014; Salles, Nicklaus & Septier, 2003; Varming et al., 2004), and for foods that are highly familiar through widespread use and consumption (Dinnella et al, 2016; Poelman & Delahunty, 2011; Poelman, Delahunty & de Graaf, 2015). The taste intensities of vegetables have also been reported as low compared to those for other foods (van Stokkom et al., 2016). Sensory food choice motives have previously been linked positively to improved personal health (Steptoe et al, 1995). Our findings suggest that strategies to promote liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties may benefit from a focus on (all) sensory properties, or from enhancement of these properties. Studies that enhance taste, through the addition of salt and/or sweet compounds are demonstrating some success (Bouhlal et al., 2013; Sharafi, Hayes & Duffy, 2013),



378 although complete dietary profiles also need to be considered. Studies that enhance visual appearance  
379 however have also demonstrated increases in intakes (Correia, O'Connell, Irwin & Henderson, 2014).  
380  
381 An interest in consuming natural foods has previously been linked to increased fruit and vegetable  
382 consumption (Pollard, Steptoe & Wardle, 1998), and organic food consumers typically consume more plant-  
383 based foods (Baudry et al., 2015; Kesse-Guyot et al., 2013) and are more likely to be vegetarian (Baudry et  
384 al., 2015). Natural and organic food consumption has previously been found to be highly correlated with  
385 healthy eating (Steptoe et al., 1995; Kesse-Guyot et al., 2013). Based on our findings, strategies to increase  
386 preferences for vegetables with less appealing sensory properties may benefit from a focus on the natural  
387 aspects of these foods. Promotion of the natural aspects of vegetables will apply to all vegetables, and may  
388 be beneficial for all vegetable consumption, but associations here suggest specific benefit for vegetables  
389 with less appealing sensory properties. Considering the increased health benefits from consuming a range  
390 of vegetables, promotion of vegetables with less appealing sensory properties, that may be less likely  
391 consumed by choice, may be particularly valuable for health (Appleton et al. 2016; Aune et al. 2017;  
392 Oyedobe et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2014; Woodside et al. 2013).  
393  
394 A suggestion to focus on the sensory aspects of foods with more preferred sensory profiles and to focus on  
395 other positive aspects of foods with less appealing sensory profiles is a direct novel result of this work. This  
396 finding adds weight to previous arguments for a multitude of reasons for food choice (Steptoe et al., 1995),  
397 and suggests the need for a variety of strategies to increase healthy food intakes.  
398  
399 Demographic differences were also found in our study. Liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory  
400 properties was higher in males, and in Denmark and Italy, and liking for vegetables with less appealing  
401 sensory properties was higher in females and in Denmark. Higher preferences in males for vegetables with  
402 more appealing sensory properties is a novel finding. These findings suggest that the promotion of  
403 vegetables with more appealing sensory properties - with sweeter tastes, more delicate flavours and  
404 brighter colours may be a more promising route for increasing vegetable consumption in males particularly.

405 A higher liking and / or consumption of vegetables by females compared to males has previously been  
406 found (Baudry et al., 2015; Guzek et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2002; Kesse-Guyot et al., 2013; Mikkila et al.,  
407 2005; Pollard et al., 1998), and has previously been attributed to an increase in healthy eating or attitudes  
408 towards healthy eating in females (Johnson et al., 2002; Mikkila et al., 2005, Monteleone et al., 2017).

409

410 Country-specific differences are likely to result, at least partly, from different cultures and consumption  
411 practices (Pelt, 1993), but differences may also have been found here as a result of differences between the  
412 samples based on demographic or individual variables that were not taken into account (e.g. parental  
413 education (Mustonen et al., 2012), PROP sensitivity (Sharafi et al., 2013)), or differences between  
414 participants in their use or understanding of the rating scales or questionnaire items (Harzing et al., 2009).  
415 Particularly, the concept of ‘regular’ may differ between cultures, resulting in different interpretations of  
416 this question. This latter concern may specifically explain the reported higher liking but lower consumption  
417 of both types of vegetables by the Danish sample, when other variables were taken into account. This  
418 effect was masked when looking at simple group differences, presumably due to other differences between  
419 the samples, e.g. in terms of demographic characteristics. This effect however is also reported in broader  
420 studies on consumption, where more Northern European countries typically consume less vegetables than  
421 more Southern European countries (EFSA, 2008; Vereecken et al., 2015). These effects are largely  
422 attributed to culture, climate and agricultural practices (Pelt, 1993), and may suggest an increased need for  
423 interventions to increase vegetable consumption in countries that are further North.

424

425 The strengths of the study include the consideration of a large sample size in each of the four European  
426 countries, the use of validated work to describe our vegetables based on sensory properties, and the use of  
427 validated questionnaires for all individual characteristics. The study is limited by the use of self-report  
428 questionnaires, and the use of rating scales that may not have been used in a comparable manner between  
429 countries (Harzing et al., 2009). Although self-report measures are commonly used in questionnaire studies  
430 of dietary behaviours, and brief measures have been reported as valid methods for measuring vegetable  
431 intake (Mainvil, Horwath, McKenzie & Lawson, 2011; Wolfe, Frongillo & Cassano, 2001), these measures

432 can be prone to inaccuracies and biases such as social desirability bias (Bingham, 1987). We also assessed  
433 liking for and consumption of only four vegetables with more appealing sensory properties and four  
434 vegetables with less appealing sensory properties, and although these vegetables were selected as those  
435 consumed in the four European countries, and were intended to allow comparisons between countries, we  
436 do recognize that different vegetables taste different (Dinnella et al., 2016; van Stokkom et al., 2016), thus  
437 different findings may have occurred had we used different specific vegetables. Tastes can differ also  
438 dependent on agricultural practices and preparation styles (Poelman & Delahunty 2011; Poelman et al.,  
439 2015; van Stokkom et al., 2016), thus differences between countries may genuinely arise. While these  
440 differences may have resulted in slight differences in absolute ratings, however, there is no reason to  
441 suspect any systematic bias in the associations between vegetable liking or consumption and individual  
442 attitudes based on our measures. The low comparability between country samples also limits the cross-  
443 country conclusions that can be made. This variability between samples however, does not reduce the  
444 value of the findings from our main analyses. Importantly however, while this work was conducted to  
445 suggest strategies to increase vegetable intakes, it must be recognised that our data are cross-sectional  
446 only and thus relationships may be bidirectional or may be influenced by additional variables. High  
447 vegetable intake may result in high vegetable liking as a result of exposure to positive experiences, or high  
448 vegetable availability may result in both high vegetable liking and high vegetable intakes through  
449 familiarity. Our suggested strategies are suggestions only – any intervention would need full testing before  
450 it can be recommended.

451  
452 In conclusion, our findings demonstrate higher consumption of and liking for vegetables with more  
453 appealing sensory properties than for vegetables with less appealing sensory properties in European  
454 adolescents. Greater regular consumption of both types of vegetables was found in individuals with  
455 healthier eating habits, and in individuals with a higher liking for each type of vegetable. Liking for both  
456 types of vegetables was associated with lower food neophobia and higher liking for other vegetable tastes,  
457 and liking for vegetables with more appealing sensory properties specifically was associated with healthier  
458 eating habits in general and a higher interest in consuming foods for sensory reasons and liking for

459 vegetables with less appealing sensory properties specifically was associated with a higher interest in the  
460 consumption of natural foods. Our findings suggest that strategies to increase vegetable consumption in  
461 adolescents may benefit from focusing on increasing healthy eating in general, and increasing vegetable  
462 liking. Increasing liking may benefit from strategies that reduce food neophobia, focus on sensory  
463 properties, or focus on the natural properties of vegetables.

464

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767 Table 1: Descriptive statistics (mean value (standard deviation)) for all individual characteristics, attitudes,  
768 vegetable consumption and vegetable liking for each country sample.

769

	Denmark (N=178)	UK (N=155)	France (N=206)	Italy (N=197)	Total (N=736)
Gender (% female:male)	58:42 <sup>a</sup>	43:57 <sup>b</sup>	59:41 <sup>a</sup>	44:56 <sup>b</sup>	51:49
Age (years)	15.4 (1.3) <sup>a</sup>	13.3 (1.4) <sup>b</sup>	13.1 (1.0) <sup>b</sup>	15.1 (1.2) <sup>c</sup>	14.3 (1.6)
FAS II <sup>1</sup> score (0-9)	6.5 (1.4) <sup>a</sup>	6.2 (1.9) <sup>a</sup>	7.1 (1.5) <sup>b</sup>	5.8 (1.6) <sup>c</sup>	6.4 (1.7)
AFHC <sup>2</sup> Index (0-23)	12.1 (4.4) <sup>a</sup>	11.0 (4.4) <sup>b</sup>	13.1 (4.2) <sup>c</sup>	11.0 (4.6) <sup>b</sup>	11.9 (4.5)
DEBQ-R <sup>3</sup> score (1-5)	2.3 (0.9) <sup>a</sup>	2.2 (0.9) <sup>a</sup>	2.4 (0.9) <sup>a,c</sup>	2.6 (0.9) <sup>b,c</sup>	2.4 (0.9)
FNS <sup>4</sup> Neophobia score (10-70)	26.6 (11.2) <sup>a</sup>	36.5 (8.4) <sup>b</sup>	31.9 (11.7) <sup>c</sup>	32.7 (11.0) <sup>c</sup>	31.8 (11.3)
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Mood (1-7)	4.5 (1.2) <sup>a</sup>	4.1 (1.2) <sup>b</sup>	3.6 (1.4) <sup>c</sup>	4.2 (1.4) <sup>b,d</sup>	4.1 (1.4)
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Sensory (1-7)	5.5 (1.1) <sup>a</sup>	5.4 (1.1) <sup>a</sup>	5.1 (1.4) <sup>b</sup>	4.2 (2.1) <sup>c</sup>	5.0 (1.6)
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Natural (1-7)	4.7 (1.4) <sup>a</sup>	4.3 (1.2) <sup>b</sup>	4.5 (1.5) <sup>a,b</sup>	4.1 (1.6) <sup>b,c</sup>	4.4 (1.5)
Number of ‘more appealing’ vegetables consumed regularly (0-4)	1.9 (1.2) <sup>a</sup>	1.9 (1.1) <sup>a</sup>	2.4 (1.2) <sup>b</sup>	1.6 (1.2) <sup>c</sup>	1.9 (1.2)
Number of ‘less appealing’ vegetables consumed regularly (0-4)	1.2 (1.0) <sup>a</sup>	0.9 (0.9) <sup>b</sup>	1.2 (0.9) <sup>a,c</sup>	1.1 (1.0) <sup>a,c</sup>	1.1 (1.0)
Liking for ‘more appealing’ vegetables (1-9)	6.9 (1.5) <sup>a</sup>	6.2 (1.4) <sup>b</sup>	7.2 (1.4) <sup>a,c</sup>	5.8 (1.8) <sup>d</sup>	6.5 (1.6)
Liking for ‘less appealing’ vegetables (1-9)	6.2 (1.6) <sup>a</sup>	4.9 (1.6) <sup>b</sup>	5.3 (1.9) <sup>c</sup>	4.6 (1.8) <sup>b,d</sup>	5.2 (1.9)

770 <sup>1</sup> – Family Affluence Scale II (Boyce and Dallago, 2004)

771 <sup>2</sup> - The Adolescent Food Habits Checklist (AFHC) (Johnson et al, 2002)



772 <sup>3</sup> - The Dutch Eating Behaviour Questionnaire - Restraint Scale (DEBQ-R) (van Strien et al, 1986)

773 <sup>4</sup> - The Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) (Pliner & Hobden, 1992)

774 <sup>5</sup> - The Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) (Stephoe et al, 1995)

775 Superscripts denote differences between countries – different letters reflect significant differences

776 between countries.

777

778 Table 2: Characteristics and attitudes associated with the regular consumption of 'more appealing' and 'less  
779 appealing' vegetables (N=736). Significant predictors (p<0.05) are highlighted in bold.  
780

	'More appealing' vegetables		'Less appealing' vegetables	
	R=0.60, R <sup>2</sup> =0.36, adj. R <sup>2</sup> =0.35, F(14,735)=28.86, p<0.01		R=0.56, R <sup>2</sup> =0.31, adj. R <sup>2</sup> =0.30, F(14,735)=23.23, p<0.01	
	Beta	p	Beta	p
Gender	-.04	.22	-.05	.15
Age	-.01	.96	.06	.15
Denmark	<b>-.10</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>-.12</b>	<b>.01</b>
UK	.01	.79	-.04	.28
Italy	-.04	.38	.07	.14
FAS II <sup>1</sup> score	.05	.15	.06	.08
AFHC <sup>2</sup> Index	<b>.13</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.01</b>
DEBQ-R <sup>3</sup> score	-.01	.79	.01	.79
FNS <sup>4</sup> Neophobia score	-.05	.16	-.03	.38
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Mood	-.01	.90	-.01	.71
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Sensory	.00	.99	.02	.57
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Natural	-.04	.32	.01	.85
Liking for 'more appealing' vegetables	<b>.54</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	.01	.73
Liking for 'less appealing' vegetables	-.02	.60	<b>.50</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>

781 <sup>1</sup> – Family Affluence Scale II (Boyce and Dallago, 2004)

782 <sup>2</sup> - The Adolescent Food Habits Checklist (AFHC) (Johnson et al, 2002)

783 <sup>3</sup> - The Dutch Eating Behaviour Questionnaire - Restraint Scale (DEBQ-R) (van Strien et al, 1986)

784 <sup>4</sup> - The Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) (Pliner & Hobden, 1992)

785 <sup>5</sup> - The Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) (Stephoe et al, 1995)

786

787 Table 3: Characteristics and attitudes associated with liking for 'more appealing' and 'less appealing'  
 788 vegetables (N=736). Significant predictors (p<0.05) are highlighted in bold.

789

	'More appealing' vegetables		'Less appealing' vegetables	
	R=0.57, R <sup>2</sup> =0.32, adj. R <sup>2</sup> =0.31, F(13,735)=26.62, p<0.01		R=0.61, R <sup>2</sup> =0.37, adj. R <sup>2</sup> =0.36, F(13,735)=33.08, p<0.01	
	Beta	p	Beta	p
Gender (1=female, 2=male)	<b>.07</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>-.09</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>
Age	.04	.40	.06	.15
Denmark	<b>.09</b>	<b>.02</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>
UK	.08	.07	.07	.08
Italy	<b>.31</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	-.02	.67
FAS II <sup>1</sup> score	-.03	.45	.03	.42
AFHC <sup>2</sup> Index	<b>.10</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	.07	.06
DEBQ-R <sup>3</sup> score	.02	.50	-.03	.36
FNS <sup>4</sup> Neophobia score	<b>-.11</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	<b>-.25</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Mood	-.01	.86	.07	.06
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Sensory	<b>.12</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	.02	.62
FCQ <sup>5</sup> – Natural	.02	.61	<b>.09</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>
Liking for 'less appealing' / 'more appealing' vegetables	<b>.35</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>	<b>.33</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>

790 <sup>1</sup> – Family Affluence Scale II (Boyce and Dallago, 2004)

791 <sup>2</sup> - The Adolescent Food Habits Checklist (AFHC) (Johnson et al, 2002)

792 <sup>3</sup> - The Dutch Eating Behaviour Questionnaire - Restraint Scale (DEBQ-R) (van Strien et al, 1986)

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794 <sup>5</sup> - The Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) (Stephoe et al, 1995)

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